

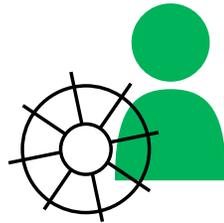
Information to Support Educators Regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is an emerging public health challenge bringing to light glaring inequities including disability awareness. ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects roughly 1 in 54 children and more than 5.4 million adults in the United States. Autism has emerged as a major public health concern as recent decades' research shows the initially-believed rarity to be a false perception. The primary symptoms of ASD are social communication challenges, restricted or repetitive behaviors, and sensory sensitivities.

Pima County wants to bring to your attention some resources and knowledge regarding ASD in our communities so that individuals can fully participate in our school environments. We hope to inform you about ASD to increase awareness and provide you with the tools to create positive environments and change. This is a guide on how educators can support autistic students in the school setting.



RELATIONSHIPS



SELF-REGULATION



COMMUNICATION



SOCIAL SKILLS

Early Signs of ASD in Children:

- Speaks later than typical or not at all (non-speaking)
- Repetition in language or movement, such as repeating the same word or sounds, hand flapping or pacing
- Atypical nonverbal communication, including avoiding eye contact, giving few facial expressions, or having a monotone
- Prefers solitary or parallel play rather than engaging in associative or cooperative play
- Preference for predictable, structured play
- Extremely distressed by changes, including new foods or changes in schedule
- Strong, persistent interest on specific topic, toy, or item

Who Can Diagnose ASD:

If a student shows any symptoms of ASD, contact their parent and inform them of the next steps to schedule an appointment to have them evaluated by a child psychiatrist, psychologist, pediatric neurologist, or developmental pediatrician.

In The Classroom:

- Students may not respond to their name or other seemingly obvious cues. They are not ignoring you but may not be able to process or respond in a way that makes sense to you.
- It may not be the case they are ignoring anyone but that they may not fully be able to process the situation.

- Eye contact can be difficult for autistic people. Some of the best listening done occurs when not looking in the direction of the person speaking. Autistic people are not ignoring you.

Environment & Structure:

- Autistic people can be extremely attached to routines. When students know what to expect, they feel safe and supported.
- If the routine is not preventing learning, interfering with another meaningful activity, is not harming others, and is socially acceptable, consider not disrupting the individual.
- If the routine is excessively stigmatizing, incremental changes can be made to minimize the severity of the routine.
- Always prepare an autistic person for necessary change. For example, "You have five minutes to finish that game and then we will go outside."
- Clearly identify how much work is expected to be completed, where they can complete the task, and what to do when work is completed.
- If the person shows anxiety when presented with a task, especially if this a new request, try to not force the issue. Allow for a cooling off period in which you provide tasks they enjoy and can be easily completed. The more complex task can be completed later, after it has been broken down into several steps.

Respecting Personal Space:

- Consider whether a teaching style is overly intrusive to the student's sensory sensitivities.
- When possible, allow the individual access to personal space or time to retreat to a calm area.
- In time, they may slowly adapt and become more familiar with people in their environment.

Sensory Considerations:

- Many autistic students have difficulty processing everyday sensory information. They can be either hyper sensitive (over-reactive) or hypo sensitive (under-reactive) to sensory input, or experience fragmented or distorted perceptions.
- A student's responses to sensory experiences may fluctuate from one day to the next. Always prepare them in advance by letting them know what to expect or provide a calming area during the following:
 - ▶ Fire, active shooter drills
 - ▶ Physical Education classes
 - ▶ Music class
 - ▶ Recess
 - ▶ Lunchtime

Communication Support:

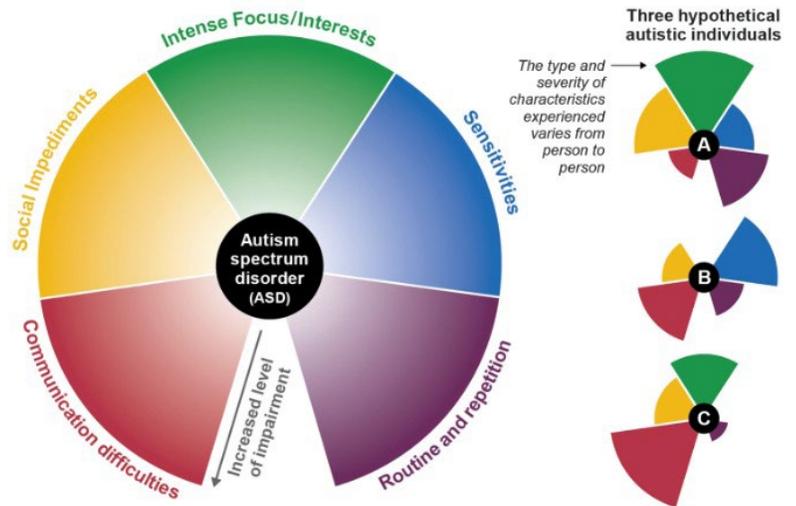
- An autistic person may have challenges in connecting with students and teachers in social environments.
- Use phrases like "Do you understand?" to increase processing time for autistic students. Allowing time for a student to process what has been said will help them digest the task at hand, and allow for clarification if needed.
- Be patient as processing time may be 10-20 seconds.
- Utilize visual aids whenever possible while teaching a lesson or explaining a task.

The ASD Spectrum:

- As shown to the right, the spectrum is not linear. This graphical interpretation is based on a number of particular areas, which fluctuate in presence and severity for each individual.

Terminology to Avoid:

- **“Normal”** when describing non-autistic individuals
 - ▶ Not autistic. A less-used but correct term is allistic.
- **“We’re all a little autistic”/“You don’t look autistic”**
 - ▶ There is no such thing. This is dismissive of the ASD experience.
- **“High or low functioning”**
 - ▶ These terms judge autistic people according to non-autistic or allistic expectations.
- **“Autism is to be fixed/cured/treated”**
 - ▶ There is nothing wrong with autistic people. They do not need to be fixed, treated or cured.
- **“Nonverbal”**
 - ▶ Non-speaking. Even if autistic people are non-speaking, they have things to communicate.
- **“Person with autism”**
 - ▶ It is preferable to say autistic person unless an autistic person prefers otherwise.
- **“Asperger’s Syndrome”**
 - ▶ Asperger’s Syndrome is no longer an official diagnosis in the DSM-5. This is now considered part of Autism Spectrum Disorder. The term Aspergers has a negative connotation within the community.



Source: GAO analysis of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5). | GAO-17-109

Personalized Educational Support:

- Consider an IEP Plan. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a plan that determines the special education services, supports and accommodations that a student may benefit from.
- To prepare for educational transition and IEP team meetings:
 - ▶ Make note of strategies you know to be successful with your student.

For more information on autism resources contact the Autism Society of Southern Arizona (520-770-1541) or visit www.as-az.org. Please continue to utilize the community resources provided to create a successful learning environment so autistic students can thrive.